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July 30, 2009

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: John F. Schunhoff, Ph.D. 
Interim Director

SUBJECT: **DHS NURSE COMPETENCY TESTING**

In October 2008, your Board directed the Department of Health Services (DHS) to develop standardized core competency assessments for all licensed and unlicensed nursing staff at each facility and clinical program. Vivian Branchick, Director of Nursing Affairs, convened a systemwide committee process (steering committee and subcommittees) to develop the competency assessment program. Committee membership included representatives from hospitals, multi-service ambulatory care centers (MACCs), comprehensive health centers (CHCs), health clinics (HCs), Juvenile Court Health Services (JCHS), DHS Human Resources (HR) and Local 721. The goal was to develop a core competency assessment for all DHS nursing staff and to comply with the recommendations of the Auditor-Controller in its October 2008 report, "Auditor-Controller's Recommendations Regarding Its Investigation of the Personnel Review of Martin Luther King, Jr.-Harbor Hospital Employees".

Methodology

DHS systemwide committee meetings took place from November 2008 through April 2009. A detailed assessment of existing staff training and continuing education programs was conducted, as well as a review of industry best practices.

Committees developed the competency program based on five key components:

- Standardized core curricula based on DHS and industry best practices and regulatory standards.
- Standardized policy ensuring that consistent testing standards are applied to patient care personnel at all facilities.
- Codified set of guidelines limiting the number of times patient care personnel may fail testing in a particular competency before being re-assigned, retained, and or referred for discipline.
- Implementation of independent central oversight for competency testing.
- Centralized aggregation and reporting of competency test results.

Study guides and review materials were then developed by the committee with input from subject matter experts.

Testing Components

The standardized core competency assessments consist of the following elements (detailed in Attachment I):

- Written tests and performance skills validation.
- Components in two categories:
 - In-patient Competency Testing including all hospital-based clinics.
 - Ambulatory Care Services Testing which included MACCs, CHCs, HCs, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Agency, Office of Managed Care (OMC) and JCHS.

Testing Process and Logistics

The testing process and logistics for the standardized core competency assessments included:

- DHS systemwide committee weekly meetings from November 2008 through April 2009 (steering committee and subcommittees).
- Study guides and review materials developed by the committee with input from subject matter experts.
- Study guides and review materials provided to Local 721 in advance of printing and staff distribution.
- Letters sent to employees advising them of testing dates based on facility-specific testing schedule; dates posted on bulletin boards and in lounges.
- Individual study packets to each employee for review prior to testing.
- Practice sessions provided in skills labs with support from nursing instructors and/or nurse managers.
- Competency testing conducted between April 13 and June 30, 2009.
- All DHS nurses tested except those who are on leave of absence; these nurses will be tested upon return to work.
- Oversight during competency testing provided by the Office of Nursing Affairs; nursing educators from DHS facilities were present at some of the testing sites, as their schedules allowed.
- Personnel were given two chances to pass competency testing; personnel not passing the first time were provided remediation prior to a second test. The second written test was a different version; a skills test cannot be revised. A second opportunity to test is common practice since some test takers may not do well the first time due to anxiety despite requisite knowledge.
- Personnel not passing the second competency test after remediation were referred to the DHS HR Performance Management Unit.
- Contract registry nurses were required to pass the competency testing in order to continue working in DHS facilities.
- Nursing instructors and faculty from affiliated schools and colleges of nursing who supervise student rotations at DHS facilities were required to pass competency testing.

Competency Testing Results

Competency assessment results are summarized below (detailed in Attachment II).

- Total of 8,041 DHS licensed and unlicensed nurses completed competency testing.
- Out of the total tested, 837 did not pass the first testing; remediation was provided prior to a second test.
- Out of total remediated, 22 did not pass the second test.
- Out of total tested, 39 employees were referred to HR's Performance Management Unit (PMU) for disciplinary action. This included the 22 personnel that did not pass the second test as well as 17 personnel that did not follow certain testing procedures.
- Each employee was interviewed by PMU staff with access to Union representation during the interview process.
- Disciplinary actions ranged from Letters of Reprimand to Separation from Service.
- Employees receiving discipline will be afforded due process based on civil service rules.

Plan for Ongoing Testing

Core competency assessments for all licensed and unlicensed nursing personnel will be conducted annually at all DHS facilities and clinical programs. The Competency Program will be overseen by the DHS Office of Nursing Affairs along with a steering committee that will review, evaluate and revise competency standards based on quality improvement data and changes in regulatory standards. Data related to competency testing will be tracked and trended by the Department and submitted to the Board of Supervisors annually.

JFS:vb

Attachments

c: Chief Executive Officer
Acting County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
Auditor-Controller

ATTACHMENT I
TESTING COMPONENTS

TESTING COMPONENTS FOR IN-PATIENT FACILITIES

Licensed Direct Caregivers -- RNs and LVNs who provide direct patient care, Nursing Supervisors, Nurse Managers, Nurse Educators, Nursing Instructors, Interim Permittees, Clinical Nurse Specialists:

- Written test that includes Infection Control, Environment of Care, Patient Safety, HIPAA, and other Regulatory Standards
- Medication test that includes Medication Calculation and Medication Safety
- Performance Stations and Skills Validation that includes Restraints and Mock Code

Licensed Non-Direct Caregivers -- RNs and LVNs who do not provide direct patient care, Case Managers, Utilization Review and Infection Control Nurses:

- Written test that includes Infection Control, Environment of Care, Patient Safety, HIPAA, and other Regulatory Standards

Non-Licensed Direct Caregivers -- Nursing Attendants, Nurse Student Workers, Direct Caregiving Technicians

- Written test that includes Infection Control, Environment of Care, Patient Safety, HIPAA, and other Regulatory Standards
- Performance Stations and Skills Validation that includes Restraints and Mock Code

Non-Licensed Non-Direct Caregivers -- Unit Secretaries, Clerks, Nursing Escort staff:

- Written test that includes Infection Control, Environment of Care, Patient Safety, HIPAA, and other Regulatory Standards

TESTING COMPONENTS FOR AMBULATORY CARE SERVICES

Licensed Direct Caregivers -- RNs and LVNs who provide direct patient care, Nursing Supervisors, Nurse Managers, Nurse Educators, Nursing Instructors, Clinical Nurse Specialists, and CRM nurses that provide direct patient care.

- Written test that includes Infection Control, Environment of Care, Patient Safety, HIPAA, and other Regulatory Standards
- Medication test that includes Medication Calculation and Medication Safety
- Performance Stations and Skills Validation that includes Mock Code or Components of Bag Valve Mask (BVM) and Handwashing

Licensed Non-Direct Caregivers -- Case Managers, Discharge Planners, Care Coordinators, Referral Center Nurses, CRM Care Managers, Risk Managers, Employee Occupational Health Nurses, Utilization Review, Office of Managed Care, EMS Agency, and licensed staff with work restrictions:

- Written test that includes Infection Control, Environment of Care, Patient Safety, HIPAA, and other Regulatory Standards

Non-Licensed Direct Caregivers -- Nursing Attendants, Community Workers, Direct Caregiving Technicians:

- Written test that includes Infection Control, Environment of Care, Patient Safety, HIPAA, and other Regulatory Standards
- Performance Stations and Skills Validation that includes Vital Signs, Role in an Emergency, Pain Inquiries and Handwashing

ATTACHMENT II
COMPETENCY TESTING RESULTS

Nurse Competency Testing Summary July 2009

| Facility Name | Date Testing Started | Date Testing Completed | Number of Employees Tested | Number of Employees Who Did Not Pass First Testing | Number of Employees Who Did Not Pass Second Testing | Total Number of Employees Referred to PMU | Disciplinary Action |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|--|---|---|---|
| LAC/USC MC | 4/13/09 | 6/18/2009 | 3597 | 366 | 7 | 7 | 4-Licensed Staff: • 2-Separation from Service • 1-Suspension • 1-Direct Order to Retest 3-Unlicensed Staff: • 3- Suspension |
| Rancho | 4/16/09 | 5/28/2009 | 612 | 37 | 1 | 13 | 1-Licensed Staff: • 1-Separation from Service 9-Licensed and 3-Unlicensed Staff: • 12 Reminder to Follow Procedure |
| Harbor | 5/4/09 | 6/8/09 | 1837 | 222 | 5 | 7 | 4-Licensed Staff: • 1-Separation from Service • 1-Reprimand • 2-Reminder to Follow Procedure 3-Unlicensed Staff: • 1-Separation from Service • 2-Suspension |
| OVMC | 6/1/09 | 6/3/2009 | 864 | 96 | 4 | 4 | 4-Licensed Staff: • 2-Separation from Service • 2-Suspension |
| Emergency Medical Services | 6/16/09 | 6/16/2009 | 33 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Non-applicable |
| Ambulatory Care Facilities | | | | | | | |
| JCHS-Total 4 sites | 6/11/09 | 6/13/2009 | 153 | 18 | 3 | 4 | 4-Licensed Staff: • 2-Separation from Service • 1-Reminder to Follow Procedure • 1-Suspension |
| Roybal | 5/11/09 | 5/13/2009 | 73 | 9 | 0 | 0 | Non-applicable |
| El Monte | 5/18/09 | 6/15/2009 | 82 | 6 | 0 | 0 | Non-applicable |
| Hudson | 5/18/09 | 5/22/2009 | 117 | 16 | 0 | 0 | Non-applicable |
| Mid-Valley | 5/20/09 | 6/17/2009 | 97 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 1-Unlicensed Staff: • 1-Reminder to Follow Procedure |
| High Desert | 5/19/09 | 5/21/2009 | 171 | 32 | 2 | 2 | 1-Licensed Staff: • 1-Separation from Service 1-Unlicensed Staff: • 1-Suspension |
| Martin Luther King | 6/8/09 | 6/12/2009 | 214 | 7 | 0 | 0 | Non-applicable |
| Costal Cluster (Long Beach & Bellflower) | 5/27/09 | 5/29/2009 | 47 | 01 | 0 | 0 | Non-applicable |
| Humphrey | 6/1/09 | 6/4/09 | 122 | 16 | 1 | 1 | 1-Unlicensed Staff: • 1- Suspension |
| Office of Managed Care | 5/21/09 | 5/21/09 | 22 | 0 | 0 | 0 | Non-applicable |
| Total | | | 8041 | 837 | 22 | 39 | |